

Tribal Uprising in the State of Gangpur: Role of Madri Kalo as a legendary figure

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Gangpur, was fourth biggest of the eleven 'A' class estates of Odisha, came formally under British supremacy in 1818 as per the terms and conditions of the provisional agreement concluded with Madhoji Bhonsle (Appa Sahib), the Maratha chief of Nagpur, following his final defeat in the Fourth Anglo-Maratha war. On the cession of this estate in 1818, the feudal supremacy of the Raja of Sambalpur on it came to an end. In 1821 separate sanads were approved by the Government to each chief of the Sambalpur group of estates with separate engagements for a period of five years.¹ The sanads is contained only general policy of the Government instead of definite rules for guidance of the Chiefs. The tribute was fixed on a low amount compare to the Maratha Government. The tribute for Gangpur was fixed Rupees 500/- and neighbouring estate Bonai is Rupees 200/-.² Gangpur was finally ceded to the Company's Government by the treaty of December 1826, which was signed between the Bhonsle Raja of Nagpur and the East India Company. As per the provisions of this treaty, Gangpur along with other Sambalpur group of estates along with all their dependences were brought under the nominal control of the East India Company's Government.³ In 1827, Raja Parasuram Sekhar Deo of Gangpur received the sanad from the British Government and signed a fresh agreement with the Government.⁴

The chiefs of Gangpur enjoyed greater power than his counterpart in the tributary Mahals of Cuttack. As there was no fear of impeachment, the chiefs of Gangpur began to exploit the people by imposing more and more tax and feudal extraction. Similarly the attitude of the colonial administrator towards the Gangpur estate appreciably favourable since the days of Surendra Sai's rebellion i.e. 1857 to 1862. During the rebellion of Surendra Sai, the Gangpur Raja do not support him, while majority of the western Odishan Rajas and Zamindars were sympathetic to the cause of Surendra Sai. This sort of loyalist attitude of the Gangpur Raja had very much pleased the British administrator but the Tribal Gauntias of the estate are displeased for this attitude of the Gangpur Raja and made them anti feudal and anti colonial.⁵

The chiefs of Gangpur, enjoyed greater power due to less intervention of the Government. They harass the people by rise the various types of feudal extractions like Bethi, Magan Rasad, Karchawal etc. They collected the land revenue at an exorbitant rate.⁶ The economic disparities between the people and feudal exploitation by the ruling Chief Raghunath Sekhar Deo triggered up an agitation in 1897 under the leadership of a tribal Guontia Madri Kalo. This was the first awakening of the sons of the soil and prepared a solid frame work for the future tribal and peasant movements. Madri Kalo belonged to a tribal community of Kuribaga village now coming under Bargaon Block of the Sundargarh district. He was the Gaonita of six revenue villages namely Kureibaga, Gudhiali, Jampalli, Liploi, Sialjor and Lamloi and for his Gaonitari service, he enjoyed large chunks of Bhogra land in twenty villages.⁷

In the administrative set up of the Gangpur estate, the revenue village under the direct control of the ruling chief was known as Khalsa village and the head man of the such village was designated as Gauntia. The rights and duties of Gauntias as see in the record was to collect Malguzai or rent from the tenants and to maintain law and order in the Gaontiar villages, for which he enjoyed large chunks of Bhogra or rent free service land and 25% of the revenue collected by him as commission. At the time of each renewal, the Gaontia had to pay a lump sum amount to the chief known as Nazrana. In Sambalpur, a Gaontia could not hold more than 20% of the total cultivable land of his Gaontiar. But, in Gangpur a Gaontia could hold more than this and treated as a rich and influential person in the villages. This prevailing practice encourages Agharias and Telis of Sambalpur and other neighbouring states to seek their fortune in Gangpur estate.

Raja Raghunath sekhar Deo of Gangpur, 1871-1917, was a nature have a tremendous desire for wealth, luxury and power.⁸ He had a dream for a new palace and a new court, for which a lump sum amount was required. To fulfil his dream into action, in 1874 A.D. he introduced Nazar Kut settlement in some villages in order to raise the revenue of the state by which he enhanced the revenue of the estate to three times more to the previous year and the additional income was fully utilized for the construction of an imposing palace.⁹

When Raja Raghunath came to know that the Agarias, Tellis, Brahamans of Sambalpur could be highest bidder as compared to the aboriginal Gontias. In 1895, in anticipation of getting more revenue through Nazarana, he ordered for the excessive enhancement of Nazrana. At the same time instead of renewing leases on fair payment, he ousted the tribal leases openly in favour of rich bidders. This direction of the Raja of Gangpur generated great discontentment among the tribal Gaonitas and resulted in the outbreak of a rebellion. In 1897,

the tribal Gontias, dislodged from their Gaontiari, raised the standard of rebellion under the leadership of a Bhuyan sardar named Madri Kalo, a very popular leader and a powerful organizer.¹⁰ This armed agitation against the Raja is not available in any Government records.

In 1895, Madri Kalo was dislodged and his Gauntiary was transferred to a new bidder named Bhagabatia Teli by the Raja. Ghasi Nunu, a royal protégée, encroached some of the Jagir lands of Madri Kalo. In 1897, under this circumstanced Madri Kalo had no way to rise in arms with his followers. Mahavir hill of Bargaon became the nerve centre of his resistance. The Raja of Gangpur failed to take steps the rebels, who were sheltered in the hills and forests of the region.

It is a rare co-incidence that, the rebellion of Birsa Munda at this of time had greatly challenged the British authorities in Chhotnagpur region of Bihar. Gangpur and Chhotnagpur being two adjacent regions, what the Government feared was that, in case, any link was established between these two groups of rebels, the situation would go out of control. Hence the Government thought of deputing a contingent of troops under the command of the Deputy Commissioner of Singhbhum to assist the state's police of Gangpur in suppressing this rebellion. But even after the arrival of the British troops, it was difficult to apprehend Madri Kalo and his followers who continued depredatory operations from their hide outs in the inaccessible hills and forest. However, finally by the application of diplomacy Raja won over some of the friends of the rebel leader. With the assistance of his reliable friend the Gaontia of Kuranga, Raja succeeded in arresting Madri Kalo in 1900 A.D.¹¹ Madri Kalo was sentenced for ten years of imprisonment of which he spent six years in Sundargarh jail and the rest four years at Ranchi. He was released from the jail in 1910.¹²

The last part of the life of Madri Kalo was miserable. Being apprehensive of the renewal of the rebellion, after his release from the jail, the Gangpur state authority had virtually rendered him paralytic by amputating the femoral artery of his leg. Four years after his release from the jail, in this deplorable paralytic condition he died in 1914 in the village Lamloi near Rajganpur.¹³ But, he left behind for the tribal tenants of Gangpur a rich tradition of popular resistance against hegemonic oppression of the state's administration. As the torch bearer of the first rebellion against the oppressive Durbar administration, Madri gave a timid generation, a sense of courage and moral strength to fight out for justice, which expressed itself in a violent form, in terms of the Munda rebellion of 1939, nearly a quarter century after his death. Another resultant change that came after Madri Kalo's rebellion was that it exposed the evils of age old Durbar administration. Hence, in 1900 AD the Government appointed the Dewan as the Chief Executive with judicial and executive powers.¹⁴ Madri Kalo, in this way, has become a living legend in the history of peasants movement in the state of Gangpur but also of Odisha. From a careful study, it reveals that the resistance of Madri Kalo was not influenced by any outside factors nor inspired by any elitist element. It was a spontaneous reaction of the resident tribals against Durbar administration and domiciled opportunities. Madri Kalo, therefore, deserves a significant place in the history of popular resistance movement in Odisha.

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